

# **The Well of Loneliness Study Guide**

## **The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall**

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# Plot Summary

The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall is a controversial novel that was banned at the time of its publication in 1928. The novel is about Stephen Gordon, a young Englishwoman who is a lesbian, in a time when acceptance of this lifestyle was non-existent. Stephen grows up unaware that there is a name for the oddities in her behaviors and emotions. Stephen's father understands, but is unable to find a way to explain what he knows to Stephen or her mother. When Stephen's father dies, Stephen is truly alone with her confusion, becoming involved in a love affair that will make her mother aware of what she is, causing an irreparable rift in their relationship. On her own, Stephen will find there are others out there like herself, even take a lover who gives her the happiness she thought she would never find, but the continuing lack of acceptance in society eventually takes all from Stephen, leaving her lost in a well of loneliness. The Well of Loneliness is a novel long before its time that is filled with the courage and strength its author had to have to put her story to paper.

Stephen Gordon has her first crush at seven. It does not occur to Stephen that there is anything unusual about having a crush on a woman until she catches the object of her affection kissing a man. Stephen turns to her father for understanding. Sir Philip, in turn, turns to the popular psychological writers of the time to learn what kind of future lies ahead for his unusual daughter. Sir Philip studies these books, but he finds it impossible to share what he has learned with either Stephen or her mother, Lady Anna. Instead, Sir Philip throws himself into caring for Stephen, teaching her to hunt and to care for the property around their home, Morton, and for the lonely future she is bound to suffer. This devotion on Sir Philip's part causes tension in his marriage that he refuses to alleviate with the truth for fear that his wife will not understand.

When Stephen turns seventeen, well educated and preparing for Oxford, her mother forces her to accept the social duties expected of a young woman of her social stature. Stephen hates the parties, hates small talk and dressing up in fancy clothes. Stephen would rather dress like her father, in suits and ties. Talking to people is torment for Stephen, who has no interest in the things women discuss and no place in the discussions of men. However, Stephen meets a young man, Martin Hallam, who is interested in what she has to say. Over the course of one winter, Stephen and Martin become very close, spending nearly every day together exploring nature. Lady Anna allows herself to hope that this relationship will turn to marriage and create a normal life for her only child. However, the moment Martin declares his love for Stephen, she pushes him away.

After Martin's departure, Sir Philip becomes more resolute in his plans for Stephen. Unfortunately, before he can see to her education at Oxford, Sir Philip is crushed by a falling tree limb. Sir Philip attempts to tell his wife about Stephen as he lies dying, but death comes too quickly. Lady Anna is devastated by the death of her husband and becomes something of a recluse, allowing Stephen to run their home. For this reason, Stephen elects to remain at Morton rather than attend school at Oxford.



Sometime after her father's death, Stephen meets Angela Crossby, an actress from New York. Stephen falls head over heels for Angela and it appears that her love is returned. However, over time Stephen comes to the realization that she can never give Angela the respectability and the security she craves. Still Stephen hangs on, accepting whatever small morsels of love Angela is willing to give. Unfortunately, Stephen hangs on too closely and she is devastated to discover that Angela is having an affair with an old enemy of Stephen's, Roger Antrim. Blinded by emotion, Stephen writes a letter to Angela, expressing how deeply she feels for her. However, Angela is afraid Stephen will tell her husband about Roger, so instead Angela gives the letter to her husband claiming that she had tried to reform Stephen and Stephen misinterpreted her intentions. The husband sends this letter to Lady Anna, causing a rift between mother and daughter that will never be repaired.

Stephen is forced to leave Morton. For several years, Stephen lives in a small flat in London with Puddles, her former governess and companion. Stephen begins writing novels and has great success with the first, but finds that something is missing from the second. A friend and fellow writer suggests that Stephen needs to experience more life to improve her writing. Stephen sets out for Paris with the intention of meeting a few of her friend's acquaintances. Instead, Stephen finds herself buying a house and remaining in Paris. After reconnecting with an old teacher and settling into her new home, Stephen turns her attention to writing her third novel. However, World War I breaks out before she is finished. Stephen immediately returns to London to help however she can in the war effort.

Stephen joins the French Army Ambulance Corp and begins transporting soldiers from the front lines to hospitals throughout the countryside. During this time, Stephen becomes close to her fellow drivers, especially a young Welch girl named Mary Llewellyn. After the war, Stephen takes Mary away on a vacation to help her heal from the stress of the war. Stephen has no intention of becoming involved with Mary, afraid of the stigma a relationship with Stephen would place on Mary in society. However, Mary convinces Stephen she understands and is strong enough to handle it. The first few months they are together are the happiest Stephen has ever known.

As time passes, Stephen returns to her writing, leaving Mary without an occupation to fill her days. When Stephen notices Mary's unhappiness, she begins taking her to parties at the home of Valerie Seymour, a lesbian living in Paris. Through Valerie, Mary and Stephen meet a great many more people like themselves. Mary befriends one couple in particular, two women from a small village in the Highlands. Over time, Mary and Stephen become close to Jamie and Barbara, often inviting them over for meals and helping to pay their bills. Jamie is proud, however, and refuses the offer of money even when Barbara becomes sick. One night Barbara becomes quite ill, suffering from double pneumonia. When Barbara dies, Jamie is devastated. Jamie kills herself.

Mary does not handle the deaths of Barbara and Jamie well. This, on top of the social ostracization of a friend Mary had thought admired them greatly, causes Mary to struggle with her acceptance of the prejudice against people like herself and Stephen. At this time, Martin Hallam returns to Stephen's life, becoming friendly with both she and



Mary. Eventually, Martin falls in love with Mary and tries to leave in order to protect Stephen from the pain of such a union. However, Stephen invites Martin to attempt to steal Mary away, sure that Mary will choose Stephen. When Mary does choose Stephen, Stephen begins to see that this might not be the right choice for her. Stephen lies to Mary, convincing her that their love affair is over and sending her into the arms of Martin.



# Book 1: Chapters 1-5

## Book 1: Chapters 1-5 Summary

This is a highly controversial novel that was banned upon its publication in 1928. It is a novel that addresses the issues of homosexuality from the point of view of a lesbian, creating characters who are sympathetic, the main reason the book was not accepted by the author's contemporaries and society as a whole.

In chapter one, Sir Philip and Lady Anna Gordon are expecting their first child after ten years of marriage. Sir Philip is so convinced the child will be a boy that he begins referring to it as Stephen almost from the moment of conception. When the child is born a girl, Sir Philip insists that they call it Stephen anyway because he is so used to the name. No more children will be born to Sir Philip and Lady Anna. Not only this, but Lady Anna finds herself put off by her child, unable to accept her as she ought to, but not clear on the reasons why.

In chapter two, seven-year-old Stephen falls in love with a housemaid named Collins. Stephen thinks of Collins often, finding it impossible to concentrate on anything but Collins. When Stephen learns one day that Collins suffers from housemaid's knee, she begins to pray that God will take it from Collins and give it to her. Stephen spends hours on her knees, hoping to develop the condition in order to relieve Collins of her suffering. When Collins learns of Stephen's prayers, she becomes more affectionate with the child, spurring on her crush. During this time, Sir Philip becomes aware of his daughter's behavior and he begins reading books that tell him more about people like Stephen. At the same time, a new male servant comes to Morton. This servant begins spending time with Collins. When Stephen catches them kissing in the garden shed, she becomes enraged and throws a flower pot at his head.

In chapter three, Sir Philip quietly removes Collins and her beau from Morton, aware of his daughter's deep grief following the end of her first crush. Anna too attempts to treat her daughter with more compassion. Lady Anna begins taking Stephen on shopping trips but cannot get the child to speak to her about her thoughts and feelings. Lady Anna continues to feel distant from her child, unable to understand her even though the child clearly adores her.

In chapter four, Stephen is given her first horse in the aftermath of her crush. Stephen names the horse Collins in an attempt to keep her love for the maid alive. However, it soon fades. During this time, Sir Philip begins taking Stephen on hunts with him. At her first hunt, Stephen, who insists on riding her horse like a man, makes her first kill and is given the fox's tail, or brush.

In chapter five, Stephen is forced to spend the afternoon with the Antrim children. Stephen dislikes the Antrim children because Violet is extremely feminine and she seems to enjoy pointing out all of Stephen's faults, while Roger is a bully who likes to



tease Stephen into a fight. On this particular day, Violet and Roger tease Stephen for attending the hunt, insisting she was given the brush out of a sense of sympathy on their father's part. Stephen rushes home after Roger refuses to fight her. When Stephen comes home in tears, Lady Anna blames her husband for Stephen's hurt, claiming he has treated her too much like a boy. Sir Philip denies this, but refuses to tell his wife the truth he has discovered about his daughter, afraid it might hurt her.

## **Book 1: Chapters 1-5 Analysis**

These first few chapters introduce Stephen Gordon and her family. Stephen is a precocious child who is spoiled by her two devoted parents. Stephen has everything she might ever want, except for the one thing she truly feels she wants. Stephen wants to be a man. Stephen dislikes everything feminine her mother attempts to force on her and she prefers to play at boy games, including dressing like Nelson and going on a hunt with her father. Stephen also has a crush on a woman and is devastated when she discovers this woman kissing a man. Stephen does not understand why she feels the way she does and this creates a lonely void in her emotional development that no one seems capable or willing to help her deal with.

Sir Philip, Stephen's father, adores his only child and wants what is best for her. Sir Philip has read many books about the condition he believes his daughter suffers and is trying to find ways to help her. However, Sir Philip has made the decision to keep this truth to himself, rather than share it with his wife and risk Lady Anna turning her back on their only child. Unfortunately, Sir Philip has also made the choice not tell Stephen what he has learned about her, leaving her alone with emotions and desires that she does not understand.

Lady Anna is a highly feminine woman who expects the same of her daughter. However, the older Stephen gets and the odder she behaves, Lady Anna finds it difficult to accept her child. Lady Anna is practically repelled by her daughter, unable to stand the way Stephen looks at her. This suggests trouble in this relationship as the novel progresses and Stephen's behavior continues to evolve.



# Book 1: Chapters 6-9

## Book 1: Chapters 6-9 Summary

In chapter six, Stephen's nurse is replaced by Mademoiselle Duphot, a French tutor. Mademoiselle Duphot attempts to be stern with her pupil, but finds her amusing and adoring, and this leaves her unable to discipline the child. Two years after Mademoiselle Duphot's arrival, Stephen learns about a local man who teaches fencing. Stephen talks her parents into allowing her to learn. Lady Anna dislikes this manly hobby, but allows Stephen to participate. During this time, Stephen is given a new horse to hunt with. Stephen names it Raftery after the great Irish poet. Sometime after this, Sir Philip informs his daughter that he will be sending Mademoiselle Duphot away and replacing her with a governess. Sir Philip feels that Stephen has spent too much time in athletic pursuits and that she needs now to spend some time with mental pursuits in order to prepare for Oxford. Stephen is not interested in pursuing an academic career, but she agrees to please her father.

In chapter seven, Miss Puddleton, or Puddle, arrives at Morton. At the same time, Sir Philip buys himself a motor car, much to the chagrin of the head groom, Williams. Sir Philip is excited by his new purchase, taking a great interest in the car's care, which encourages Stephen to become interested as well. At the same time Puddle takes over the schoolroom, returning order to the small room and forcing Stephen to concentrate on her studies. Although Stephen professes to hate her studies, Puddle manages to make it exciting for her. In return, Stephen reveals an amazing talent for writing.

In chapter eight, Stephen has turned seventeen and her mother is attempting to introduce her into society. Stephen hates these social events, however, finding herself awkward and self-conscious, unable to find an interest in the small talk of the women or a place among the men. Lady Anna continuously pushes her daughter, determined to find her a good husband so that she might stop worrying about her so often. Unfortunately, Stephen's social awkwardness only grows.

In chapter nine, Stephen and her father begin spending a great deal of time alone together in Sir Philip's study, discussing books. Sir Philip is pleased with his daughter's desire to write and he pushes her to pursue that career. Lady Anna feels cut out during these discussions, however, despite the fact that Sir Philip often invites her to join in. Lady Anna is not highly educated; therefore, much of the discussion goes over her head. This causes Lady Anna to resent her daughter even more, something Sir Philip notices and resents in his wife. A tension comes into their marriage that was never there before. In fact, their marriage had always been a perfect one, filled with unselfish love.





## Book 1: Chapters 6-9 Analysis

Mademoiselle Duphot comes into Stephen's life in a time when she needs a female presence. Mademoiselle Duphot adores Stephen, treating her with all the compassion her mother appears to lack. Mademoiselle is an important figure in Stephen's life, one who shows her it is okay to be who she is. She is a figure who will reappear as the novel continues to develop.

Puddle enters Stephen's life during these chapters as well. Puddle is a governess, come to teach Stephen what she must learn in order to be educated at Oxford as her father would like. Sir Philip is concerned that his daughter will have to be well educated because she will never marry and will never have a man to care for her. Puddle turns out to be a woman of structure, someone who gives Stephen boundaries and opens a new world of books to her pupil. This education also opens a new subject for Stephen and her father to discuss, allowing their relationship to grow that much closer.

Even as Stephen grows older and becomes more athletic and well educated, her mother continues to grow distant. Lady Anna simply does not understand her daughter or her daughter's inability to act with the feminine behaviors all girls are eventually expected to adopt. This causes Lady Anna to treat her child with indifference, an act that injects tension into her once perfect marriage. Lady Anna is just as confused as Stephen, perhaps more so because of her own husband's reaction to their child's odd behaviors, suggesting to the reader that Anna will not be open to the truth should it ever come out.



# Book 1: Chapters 10-14

## Book 1: Chapters 10-14 Summary

In chapter ten, the tensions between Lady Anna and Sir Philip hang over the family during their Christmas rituals that year. However, some hope lightens Lady Anna's mood when Stephen meets Martin Hallam at the Atrims' New Year's Eve party.

In chapter eleven, Martin Hallam begins spending a great deal of time at Morton, walking the grounds with Stephen. They talk of many things, discovering they share many of the same opinions. People begin to talk about the time Stephen spends with Martin, gossiping on where it might be going. Lady Anna becomes excited, imagining Stephen marrying Martin and living a normal life. However, it all comes to a screeching halt when Martin tells Stephen he loves her. Stephen becomes terrified and disgusted, running from him as though their friendship had meant nothing. Crushed, Martin leaves London immediately.

In chapter twelve, no one asks what happened between Martin and Stephen, but rumors spread based on Stephen's odd behaviors. This episode sends Stephen down a path of self exploration, but she finds few answers to her questions. Finally Stephen goes to her father to ask for answers to her questions. Sir Philip assures his daughter there is nothing wrong with her, but he misses the opportunity to tell her the truth about herself.

In chapter thirteen, the neighbors continue to gossip about Stephen, questioning everything she does, including her riding. Only one neighbor stands up for Stephen and that is Colonel Antrim, the father of her two biggest enemies. Even Sir Philip and Lady Anna discuss Stephen. Lady Anna is devastated by Martin's departure and she demands to know why he has gone, revealing to her husband her fears for Stephen. This fight leads to many others, creating once again a deep tension between them. However, Sir Philip still finds himself reluctant to tell either Stephen or Anna the truth about Stephen's nature.

In chapter fourteen, Sir Philip is supervising the cutting of a cedar tree when one of the limbs falls on him. Sir Philip is taken into the house and the doctor called, but his injuries are too great for any chance of survival. Stephen and Lady Anna sit with Sir Philip as they wait for the doctor. When he arrives, all the doctor can offer is drugs. However, Sir Philip refuses. Sir Philip needs to be clearheaded in order to speak his peace to Anna. Sir Philip tries to tell Lady Anna about Stephen, to beg her to help their daughter, but death claims him before he can.

## Book 1: Chapters 10-14 Analysis

Martin Hallam is introduced in these chapters. Martin is a man that Stephen finds interesting, a man who shares many of her same feelings and emotions. Stephen wants



a friend, but Martin falls in love, wanting to spend his life with Stephen. Stephen is repulsed by this, unable to imagine why Martin would ruin such a good friendship with talk of love and affection. This appears to be the final climactic moment for the reader, the moment when it is finally made clear that Stephen will never love a man, something her father knew long ago. However, Sir Philip continues to refuse to tell either Stephen or Lady Anna the reasons for Stephen's revulsion at the idea of being with Martin. Sir Philip believes there is time and that he will be there to help guide Stephen through her difficult life. Unfortunately, Sir Philip dies in an accident, unable to tell either his daughter or his wife the truth about Stephen.



## Book 2: Chapters 15-19

### Book 2: Chapters 15-19 Summary

In chapter fifteen, Stephen, devastated by the death of her father, decides to remain at Morton rather than go to Oxford. Puddle wants to help Stephen, to explain why her father so desperately wanted her to go to Oxford, but she cannot speak the truth out of fear of Lady Anna's reaction. Stephen refuses to concentrate on her studies. The only comfort Stephen can find is in the horses. However, an attempt to hunt without her father fails miserably and Stephen cannot do it again. Instead, Stephen sells off her father's hunting horses, keeping on her mother's carriage horses, her own two horses, and two of her father's beloved horses.

In chapter sixteen, Williams, the head groom, retires to his cottage on Morton property. A year passes, finding Stephen twenty-one, a rich and independent woman. One day, Stephen goes into town to cash a check and runs into a pair of dogs fighting. Stephen separates the two dogs and helps the smaller dog's owner, Angela Crossby, take her dog to the vet. After the dog, Tony, is patched up, Stephen drives Angela home. At the Crossby home, The Grange, Stephen meets Angela's angry husband. Angela is kind, however, and invites Stephen to call her anytime. That very night, a nervous Stephen calls and makes a date to visit Angela on Sunday.

In chapter seventeen, Stephen goes to The Grange for tea on Sunday, a nervous wreck for the anticipation of seeing Angela Crossby again. The tea goes quite badly because of Stephen's terrible nerves, but Angela is a gracious, open hostess, leaving Stephen feeling hope for a future relationship. Stephen thinks of nothing but Angela all the way home. At that moment, Angela is also thinking of Stephen. Angela writes a note, inviting Stephen to come to lunch the following Tuesday.

In chapter eighteen, Stephen and Angela have become friends. Stephen has invited Angela to Morton and gives her a tour of the property. As they walk through the lands Stephen loves so much, she tells Angela how much she cares for her. It is then that they share their first kiss.

In chapter nineteen, Angela and Stephen spend that summer together, sharing their love in rare moments alone. Stephen is deeply in love and she often asks Angela to go away with her. Finally one day, Angela asks Stephen a simple question that says it all: Can you marry me? This question makes it clear to Stephen that Angela will never leave her husband, that these stolen moments are all she will ever get.

### Book 2: Chapters 15-19 Analysis

Stephen has lost in her father the only person who understands her and give her unconditional love. This loss is profound and Stephen is unclear where her life should lead her to now. Stephen takes control of Morton for her mother, but their relationship



continues to be strained. It is a difficult situation, but Stephen would never consider leaving Morton because it is the only home she has ever known and she loves it there.

Stephen falls in love when she meets Angela Crosby. Angela is an actress from New York, married to an Englishman. Angela is a loving friend to Stephen, sharing with her embraces and kisses but refusing to give herself entirely to this woman. Angela needs respectability, a respectability that is only a step up from the social atmosphere in which Stephen herself lives. It is in loving Angela that Stephen realizes what little she has to offer a lover, despite her great wealth and family name. Stephen once again discovers that being a woman is a downfall in every way.

When Stephen meets Angela Crosby, Puddle has an odd reaction. Puddle wants to warn Stephen about women like Angela. However, the reader finds themselves wondering about Puddle's fear for Stephen, about her apparent knowledge on the subject. It was hinted at before, but now the reader finally realizes that Puddle is like Stephen, she has simply found ways of dealing with her oddities.



## Book 2: Chapters 20-23

### Book 2: Chapters 20-23 Summary

In chapter twenty, Angela and Stephen avoid each other for three weeks after Angela refuses to run away with Stephen. Angela is unhappy because this leaves her with no one but her angry husband, and Stephen is unhappy because she loves Angela and feels she cannot live without her. Puddle watches Stephen's emotional crisis and wants to help, but again she is afraid to say anything because of how Lady Anna might react. Finally Stephen gives in and asks for Angela's forgiveness. From that time on, Stephen goes out of her way to make Ralph happy and less suspicious of her friendship with Angela for Angela's sake.

In chapter twenty-one, the Crossbys go to Scotland while Stephen goes to Cornwall with her mother. Stephen is miserable the whole time, waiting anxiously for every letter from Angela. The letters are few and far between, and each is highly impersonal, as though they were truly only friends. Stephen has no one to turn to and in fact becomes even more aware of how distant her mother is from her. On the way home from Cornwall, Stephen talks her mother into stopping in London. One day, alone, Stephen goes shopping for a gift for Angela's birthday. Stephen buys Angela a perfect pearl ring in the same store where her father had her mother's engagement ring designed.

In chapter twenty-two, Stephen and her mother return home. Stephen visits with her horses and with Williams, the old groom. It makes Stephen happy to be home.

In chapter twenty-three, Stephen waits impatiently for Angela to return home. In the meantime, Violet Antrim comes over often, eager to talk about her engagement and the romance beginning to bloom between her brother Roger and Angela Crossby, who happened to be staying with a mutual friend. Stephen attempts to hide her anger with Violet's gossiping, but the moment she has a chance, Stephen sends a telegram to Angela begging her to come home. Stephen waits impatiently for Angela's scheduled return after her terse telegram refusing to change her plans.

At The Grange, Stephen finds Angela unpacking her bags with a maid. At first Angela seems unhappy to have Stephen there. Then, when they are alone, Angela begs Stephen to hold her as she tells the story of her family's ruin in the American Civil War. The war took all her family's money, forcing her father to move her to New York. However, Angela's father died, leaving her alone and forced to become an actress to provide for herself. This profession did not pay enough, however, and Angela was forced to take a lover for support. When this lover left her, Angela found herself lucky to be engaged to Ralph Crossby. Now Angela refuses to do anything that might put that safety at risk.



## Book 2: Chapters 20-23 Analysis

Stephen is in love with Angela and devastated by her inability to give Angela the security and social standing that she needs. Angela explains this need to Stephen, explaining how her father's death left her desperate and just a step above a prostitute. Ralph rescued Angela from this life, giving her the security she needs, and Angela is deeply afraid of losing that. This explaining comes as Stephen begins to suspect Angela is pushing her away for Roger Antrim, her old childhood enemy. However, Stephen refuses to believe that Angela does not love her anymore and she holds on tighter than she should, further pushing Angela away. Stephen is so confused and so lonely that she would be willing to stay with a woman like Angela, taking only what little is offered, in order to find some degree of happiness.



## Book 2: Chapters 24-27

### Book 2: Chapters 24-27 Summary

In chapter twenty-four, Stephen tries to continue her relationship with Angela, but soon discovers that Roger is coming between them. Soon it seems that Stephen is stuck in a triangle of people who want Angela's love and coming out on the losing end. Soon Stephen and Angela find themselves fighting over Roger and the many letters he sends her from his post with the military. Months go by in misery as Stephen becomes more and more convinced she is losing Angela.

In chapter twenty-five, Violet continuously comes to Morton to gossip about her brother's growing affection for Angela. As a result, Stephen goes to London and buys a new car and many new, fine clothes in order to impress Angela with her money. However, it soon becomes obvious to Stephen that Angela cannot be won over by money without security.

In chapter twenty-six, Stephen is with Angela for one glorious afternoon when Angela suddenly cuts their day short, claiming a headache. Stephen worries about Angela, since Ralph is away, and she waits by the phone all night for Angela's call. When Angela does not call, Stephen goes to her house to check on her. Standing in the garden, Stephen sees Angela kiss Roger goodbye at the door. Stephen is so heartbroken that she drives through the countryside all day with no memory of where she has been. That night, Stephen writes a letter to Angela that expresses all her emotions, page after page. Angela, afraid Stephen will tell Ralph about her affair with Roger, gives the letter to Ralph and claims she had been trying to reform Stephen when she took the situation too far. Ralph becomes furious and promises to deal with the situation for his wife.

In chapter twenty-seven, Lady Anna asks Stephen into her study. Lady Anna reads a letter to Stephen that was written by Ralph Crossby, asking that Stephen no longer come to his house. Included in the letter is a copy of Stephen's letter. When Stephen confirms that she wrote the letter, Lady Anna admits she never thought Stephen was right, that she wished she were dead at her feet. Then Lady Anna asks that she not be forced to live with Stephen any longer, asking who should leave Morton. Stephen agrees to leave her beloved Morton. Afterward, Stephen goes into her father's study where she finds the psychology books he studied so closely that told him about Stephen. These books are all Stephen will take from Morton.

### Book 2: Chapters 24-27 Analysis

This love affair with Angela has taught Stephen how important respectability is and how little her money can provide for a potential lover when it comes to respectability and acceptance. This affair is an eye opener, a moment in Stephen's life that is profound and shows her how lonesome her life could be. Added to the grief of this revelation,





Stephen is turned out by her mother, a woman who has never been able to accept her daughter's oddities and who is deeply ashamed by the sexual perversion she believes her daughter has committed. This is a dark time for Stephen, sending her away from the only home she has ever known, away from the only people with any expectation of love for her, and away from the only security she will ever know. Included in all this, Stephen learns the truth of her nature and that her father knew, information that Stephen is not emotionally ready to deal with at this point, leaving her emotionally distraught and deeply confused.



## Book 3: Chapters 28-30

### Book 3: Chapters 28-30 Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, Stephen and Puddle are living in a small flat in London. Stephen has been gone from Morton for more than two years, except for occasional visits to keep up appearances for her mother's sake. On one of these visits, Stephen learns that the Crossbys have returned back to America, removing the need for Stephen to keep up appearances with her mother. In the past two years, Stephen has written a highly successful novel and is currently working on a second, although she is unhappy with how it is going. Puddle worries about Stephen because she keeps herself isolated, refusing to go out to parties or even to a restaurant. Puddle deals with all the reporters who come to the house looking to interview that great new author.

In chapter twenty-nine, Stephen's new novel is published nine months later, but the novel is not as good and therefore is not as accepted as the first. Shortly after this, Raftery, whom Stephen has brought to London with her, grows lame. After asking every vet in London for help, Stephen decides it is time to take Raftery home to Morton. Once home, Stephen shoots Raftery herself and has him buried before the first fence he ever jumped. Lady Anna offers to put a stone up for Raftery, but Stephen brushes off this attempt at comfort.

In chapter thirty, Stephen meets again an acquaintance, Jonathan Brockett. Jonathan Brockett is a playwright whom Stephen finds amusing. One day, after Stephen's second book was published, Brockett comes to her flat and tells her that her book failed because she lacks life experience. Brockett suggests that Stephen go on a trip and meet some new people. Brockett suggests Paris, where he might make introductions to some of his own friends. Puddle is resentful of Brockett's interference, but Stephen comes to realize that she has not made herself a real home since leaving Morton, a home she deeply misses but knows will never be home again. Stephen decides to go to Paris. Before leaving, Stephen writes her mother a letter informing her of her travel plans and asking that she not write because Stephen will not write back, nor will she make any more visits back to Morton.

### Book 3: Chapters 28-30 Analysis

Stephen has changed over the two years that have passed since the end of chapter twenty-seven. Stephen has matured, grown less trusting and somewhat isolated from people. Stephen is afraid of having her heart broken again; therefore, she has locked herself away to prevent this from happening, allowing only Puddle and a fellow writer, Brockett, to enter her world. However, her isolation is damaging her career, Stephen's only means of changing the world in which she lives and making it easier for her and her kind to find love. Therefore, Stephen decides to make a change and visit Paris.



## Book 3: Chapters 31-34

### Book 3: Chapters 31-34 Summary

In chapter thirty-one, Brockett joins Stephen and Puddle a short time after their arrival in Paris and begins showing them around. Stephen becomes aware that many of the things Brockett is showing her has to do with her nature, with homosexuality. This embarrasses Stephen, who is used to hiding her true nature. However, Brockett also shows her the tourist version of Paris as well. Finally Brockett takes Stephen to meet Valerie Seymour, a rich Englishwoman living in Paris. Stephen dislikes Valerie, feeling as though she is being accepted not for who she is but for what she is. However, during this visit Stephen decides to make her home in Paris, causing Puddle to fear she has made this choice to be near those of her own kind, something Puddle fears will be a mistake.

In chapter thirty-two, Stephen buys a house on Rue Jacob and begins renovations on the house. Stephen enjoys working with the architect and picking out furniture, wallpaper, and carpets that fit her personality. Stephen employs a Breton family to cook and clean for them. On Christmas Eve, Stephen's twenty-seventh birthday, she and Puddle moved into the house.

In chapter thirty-three, Valerie Seymour pays a visit to Stephen and Puddle, but Stephen gets out of returning the courtesy because she is working again. Stephen also begins lessons with a master Fencer, Buisson, who is quite impressed with Stephen's skill. Stephen takes to taking long walks during this time as well, enjoying the sights and sounds of Paris. One afternoon, Stephen runs into her old tutor, Mademoiselle Duphot, who is very happy to see Stephen. Mademoiselle Duphot's mother has died, but her sister has gone blind so she cares for her now. Stephen and Puddle visit them in their home where they learn of their belief that a deceased nun created a miracle to help Julie see with her fingers rather than her eyes. Soon Puddle and Stephen become regular visitors to the Duphots.

In chapter thirty-four, war breaks out in Europe. Stephen and Puddle decide to return to England to help with the war effort after learning that most of the men in and around Morton have enlisted, and that Brockett is also joining. Lady Anna has also agreed to take convalescents at Morton to do her part for the country. Back in London, Puddle gets a job with the Government departments and Stephen joins the London Ambulance Column. Stephen wants to go to the front lines, but she is denied because of her gender. However, Stephen notices that the war has brought out many like herself, and she finds this to be ironic that a society who shuns these women could so readily accept them in a time of need.



## Book 3: Chapters 31-34 Analysis

The move to Paris is symbolic of Stephen's desire to remove herself from all memories of the past, to help her move beyond her love for Morton. It is a difficult move, but it is an important move that shows the reader that Stephen has matured and come to a place within herself where she can find a little happiness, even if it is only in her work. In making this change, Stephen has befriended a woman who has a nature like her own, finding acceptance from a place that she feels is unearned and prejudicial in its own way. Again Stephen has isolated herself, even as she renews her friendship with her old tutor Mademoiselle Duphot. This isolation is different, however, and it appears to bring Stephen the inspiration she needed to refresh her work. Stephen shows strength in these chapters and a resilience to go on with her life even when in the depths of emotional despair. Hopefully the war that has just broken out will give Stephen more strength in order to face whatever might come after.



## Book 4: Chapters 35-39

### Book 4: Chapters 35-39 Summary

In chapter thirty-five, Stephen is in France where she has become a member of Breakspeare Unit, a division of the French Army Ambulance Corps. Stephen is watching the women around her sleep, including the young woman in her lap, Mary Llewellyn. Stephen has taken the young woman under her wing to teach her the ropes and to protect her. Stephen thinks about the days before she left England, when she went home to visit Morton. Afterward, Stephen talked Puddle into going to Morton to live with Lady Anna, despite Puddle's reluctance to do so. Stephen is called back to reality when the alarm goes up. Stephen takes Mary and goes to the front lines, picking up soldiers from the poste de secours. Stephen and Mary makes this trip dozens of times for more than twenty-four hours, as they have done hundreds of times before.

In chapter thirty-six, the reader learns Mary is a strong person and something of a mechanic as well. Stephen has grown accustomed to her, comforted by her mere presence. Stephen and Mary often spend long hours talking in the night, annoying the others around them. There are only two strong drivers in the unit, and most of the others want to drive with them. However, Stephen only takes Mary and the other driver is injured. Therefore, one day Breakspeare tells Stephen she must place Mary in rotation and drive with others. This causes Stephen a great deal of fear for Mary's safety. Stephen tries to keep Mary from seeing many of the unpleasant things about war, but occasionally fails. One afternoon, Stephen is looking for a poste de secours when she is shot, taking a grazing wound in the face. Later Stephen receives the Croix de Guerre for her courage. After the ceremony, Mary begs Stephen to not send her away.

In chapter thirty-seven, the end of the war comes. Mary and Stephen stay with their unit until it is scheduled to leave for Germany. Stephen then takes Mary to her house in Paris where they rest for a few days. Then Stephen sends Mary to visit her family in Wales while she goes to visit Morton. Stephen and Mary will then vacation together in Orotava, where Stephen hopes Mary will recover from her exhaustion. Stephen is aware that Mary is in love with her, but she hopes to dissuade her, to convince her that a love like theirs would only bring her pain. To underscore this decision, Stephen becomes aware of her mother's reluctance to talk about Mary with her. Before leaving Morton, Puddle tells Stephen that she would rather remain at Morton than to return to Paris, anxious for Stephen's elderly mother.

In chapter thirty-eight, Stephen and Mary arrive in Orotava. Orotava is a spring-like paradise, and both women find great enjoyment in sitting in the garden of their rented home and hiking through the hills surrounding the home. They both befriend the four servants who work at the house, one of whom falls madly in love with Mary. However, over time Mary becomes stronger and she begins pushing her affection on Stephen. Stephen resists her, causing tension between the two. Finally Mary confronts Stephen with her feelings. Stephen makes her speech to Mary that she has practiced for weeks,



explaining the hardships of a relationship such as theirs. Mary insists that she is strong enough to accept the hardships as long as Stephen loves her.

In chapter thirty-nine, Stephen and Mary spend a blissful few weeks together in Orotava, unaware of the gossip circulating among the servants and the jealousy of the young man who fancied himself in love with Mary. Both Stephen and Mary find happiness and fulfillment in one another, content their final days at Orotava.

## **Book 4: Chapters 35-39 Analysis**

Stephen proves her strength and bravery when she joins an ambulance unit on the front lines in France. Stephen has struggled with her own nature, but she has never turned down a fight before. Now Stephen proves that to those around her when she wins a medal for her bravery. At the same time, Stephen meets Mary Llewellyn, a nineteen-year-old orphan who looks up to Stephen and decides that she cannot live without her. Stephen is afraid Mary is naive, that she will not understand the difficulties of a relationship such as theirs. However, Mary is stronger than she appears and she insists that she understands what she faces in her relationship with Stephen. Stephen continues to wonder just how strong Mary is and if she truly understands what they are up against, but the reader suspects that there is more to Mary than Stephen believes.



## Book 5: Chapters 40-46

### Book 5: Chapters 40-46 Summary

In chapter forty, Mary and Stephen return to the house on Rue Jacob. That spring is a happy, relaxed time in which Stephen and Mary spend every waking hour trying to make each other happy. Stephen introduces Mary to Mademoiselle Duphot and her sister, Julie, pleased that they accept Mary so willingly.

In chapter forty-one, Stephen buys two new cars in order to drive Mary all over Paris. Stephen does all she can to spoil Mary, giving her new furniture for her room, taking her shopping, and going out to dinner as often as she likes. When at home, Mary begins to rescue birds from local pet stores and one day she brings home a dog that she names David.

In chapter forty-two, Lady Anna asks Stephen to visit Morton to go over business, but omits any mention or invitation to Mary. Stephen is offended by this and afraid it will hurt Mary's feelings. However, Mary supports Stephen's decision to return to England for a short time. Mary misses Stephen deeply, however, and nothing brings her out of her depression, even the playfulness of David.

In chapter forty-three, Stephen returns from her trip and settles down to rewrite her third novel. Mary settles to her little occupations, but is soon bored and sad without Stephen's company. Mary will often sit in Stephen's study, hoping for some companionship, but Stephen will often not notice she is there. Mary will stay awake late in the night, waiting for Stephen to finish her work, but Stephen will often work until the early hours of the morning. Soon Mary loses weight from all the meals she has refused because Stephen does not dine with her. Eventually Stephen notices Mary's unhappiness, but cannot understand the reason. Brockett points it out to Stephen on a Christmas Eve visit, encouraging Stephen to take Mary to Valerie Seymour's, where she will meet others like herself. Stephen agrees and makes the suggestion to Mary. Three days later, Valerie sends an invitation.

In chapter forty-four, Stephen and Mary attend a party at Valerie Seymour's where they are introduced to more than a dozen people. There are artists, writers, and musicians. One is a painter named Wanda who is an alcoholic. Another is Jamie, a musician, who has come to Paris to attend school and lives with a childhood lover, Barbara. Afterward, Mary announces her excitement at meeting these people who so willingly accepted Stephen as she should be accepted.

In chapter forty-five, Stephen finishes her book and sends it off to the publisher. Mary has befriended Jamie and Barbara; therefore, they spend a great deal of time dining with them when Stephen is free. Jamie is very poor, and she and Barbara often have nothing to eat so Stephen and Mary take every excuse to send them food. When Jamie throws a party where she has invited some black men from her school to sing slave



spirituals, Stephen and Mary provide enough food to feed Barbara and Jamie for weeks after the party. The party is intense, the music singing of desperation that Stephen and her friends know only too well.

In chapter forty-six, Stephen's book is released and it is a success. Everyone is happy for Stephen, even Violet Peacock, her old childhood enemy. That summer, Stephen and Mary take a trip to Italy where they meet a woman named Lady Massey and her daughter. Mary and Lady Massey become quick friends. This friendship continues when they return to Paris, where Lady Massey is staying for a time. Lady Massey returns to England, but she invites Stephen and Mary to visit her estate for Christmas. Mary is excited by this prospect because she has never visited an estate such as that which the Masseys own. However, shortly before they are to leave for England, Stephen receives a letter from Lady Massey telling her of rumors she has heard regarding Stephen and that she no longer wants to have her and Mary for Christmas. In fact, Lady Massey would prefer if she never heard from Stephen or Mary again.

## **Book 5: Chapters 40-46 Analysis**

Stephen and Mary return to Paris and find bliss in the everyday life. However, this soon ends as the real world begins to intrude. Lady Anne invites Stephen to Morton, but refuses to acknowledge Mary or what she means to her daughter. This spurs Stephen back into her writing in an attempt to make a better world for Mary. Unfortunately, this work requires Stephen's constant attention, something that takes her away from Mary. Mary becomes bored, unhappy with an idle life. If Mary had been married to a man, she would have had household duties and a child to care for, but with Stephen she only has the stray animals she has rescued and the rare moment with Stephen. This suggests trouble for the young couple, adding tension to a novel that has already had some dark, tense moments and seemed to have overcome them.

Mary and Stephen make friends among people like themselves and befriend Jamie and Barbara, a couple much like themselves. This friendship helps relieve Mary of her unhappiness and opens a new avenue of acceptance for both of them. This friendship also contrasts with the friendship Mary develops with Lady Massey that ends in disappointment when Lady Massey picks social acceptance over friendship. At the same time, the author makes a comparison between the plight of the American slave and the lifestyle of the ostracized homosexual. It is a dark comparison, but in the time in which this novel is set, it appears an appropriate comparison.





## Book 5: Chapters 47-50

### Book 5: Chapters 47-50 Summary

In chapter forty-seven, Stephen and Mary spend their Christmas with Jamie, Barbara, and some of their other friends instead. Stephen invites them to dinner, having a deep conversation with Wanda about religion that bores the other guests but makes Stephen feel protective over the alcoholic. Stephen attends church with Wanda and finds herself surprised by the depth of Wanda's devotion to a God who could abandon them in the way he has.

In chapter forty-eight, Stephen and Mary begin going out to nightclubs with their homosexual friends. The experience is new to them both, but they are happy to find a place where they can dance together without being stared at by so-called normal people. They visit three bars on their first night out, enjoying the relaxed and joyous atmosphere of these places. At the third bar, Stephen is made fun of by another patron, but she feels secure enough in her friends to ignore it. They drink all night, enjoying each other's company, until finally Stephen is able to get everyone safely home.

In chapter forty-nine, the daughter of Stephen's servants, Adele, marries her fiancé. Stephen provides most of the food, the dress, and her home for the reception. Stephen attends and is touched by the devotion she sees in this couple. Afterward, Stephen leave the room to allow the reception to take place. During that time, the neighborhood baker makes fun of Stephen until Adele's father silences him with the fact that Stephen is a decorated hero in the eyes of France. Stephen hears none of this, but finds herself sliding into a depression because Adele with have something with her new husband that Stephen will never be able to give to Mary.

In chapter fifty, Stephen and Mary vacation in Houlgate that summer and they invite Jamie and Barbara to join them. Barbara has had a chronic cough for some time and she seems to be growing worse. However, Jamie refuses to take the money it will require to get medical care for Barbara. Upon their return to Paris, Barbara seems to grow steadily worse. One night, Jamie comes to Stephen's house and tells them that she and Barbara quarreled and Barbara left the flat only to return a short time later ill. Stephen and Mary return to the flat with Jamie and find Barbara deathly ill. Stephen calls her doctor, but the doctor says that Barbara has double pneumonia and that her heart is very weak. It is unlikely she will survive. A nurse comes to care for Barbara, but she dies late the following night. Jamie asks to be left alone with Barbara, a wish Stephen and Mary willingly grant. However, when they return the following morning, it is only to discover Jamie has committed suicide.



## Book 5: Chapters 47-50 Analysis

Stephen and Mary throw themselves into a social life with their homosexual friends, too badly burned to risk another friendship with so-called normal people. This includes Mademoiselle Duphot and her sister, as Stephen becomes afraid that their deep religion will cause them to scorn Stephen as well should they learn the truth of her relationship with Mary. The reader, however, believes that Mademoiselle Duphot would have understood had Stephen only given her a chance.

Mary embraces her friendship with Jamie and Barbara, spending a great deal of time with them and doing all she can to make their lives easier. However, Jamie is a proud woman and she wants to care for Barbara on her own; therefore, she refuses any help Mary offers to take care of Barbara's medical bills. This leads to a double pneumonia that takes Barbara's life. Jamie is left alone, unable to return to her small village with Barbara's body, unable to even mourn Barbara as a lover should have the right to do. This leaves Jamie with only one choice, and that is to take her own life and be with Barbara in death as she was in life. This episode is a sad comment on the lack of acceptance homosexuals received at the time and it illustrates to a much higher degree the pain and exclusion Mary and Stephen might expect in the future of their own relationship.



## Book 5: Chapters 51-56

### Book 5: Chapters 51-56 Summary

In chapter fifty-one, Mary takes the deaths of Jamie and Barbara hard. Mary cannot overcome it and she often discusses it with Stephen in an attempt to understand. At the same time, Stephen turns to Valerie Seymour for understanding. Their opinions differ, but Stephen finds some comfort in the ability to discuss these things with someone who will listen and provide their own opinions.

In chapter fifty-two, Stephen receives a letter from Martin Hallam telling her he is in Paris and would like to renew their friendship. Stephen immediately calls him and sets up a dinner date. Mary is pleased to meet someone who knew Stephen before she did, and she comes to like Martin. The dinner is a pleasant one. Stephen finds that Martin has realized what her true nature is and has accepted her for what she is. This includes her relationship with Mary. However, Martin's Aunt Sarah is not as accepting and Stephen finds her polite, but disapproving. Stephen refuses to return to Aunt Sarah's, but encourages Mary to go if she would like.

In chapter fifty-three, Stephen and Mary find themselves going out with Martin quite often. It seems that having Martin with them makes it acceptable for Mary and Stephen to dine in some restaurants they might have avoided before because of the attention Stephen's odd dress might have drawn. The friendship between Stephen and Martin is near perfect and Mary has become her old self again, relaxed and happy in her life. It makes Stephen happy to see her so content.

In chapter fifty-four, Martin finds himself falling in love with Mary. In an attempt to spare Stephen's feelings, Martin decides to leave Paris. Stephen becomes angry and insists that Martin not leave, that there is no way he could take Mary from her. Martin agrees to compete with her, assuring her that being with Martin would be the best thing for Mary.

In chapter fifty-five, Stephen becomes aware of the tension between herself and Mary, tension caused by Mary's growing feelings for Martin. However, Martin is clearly losing the competition. Mary loves Stephen and has no intention of leaving her. In fact, Mary has become jealous of the time Stephen spends with Valerie Seymour. One day during an argument, Mary tells Stephen that, if not for her, she would be able to love someone like Martin. This causes Stephen to think. When Martin comes to tell her once more that he is leaving, Stephen asks him to wait once more.

In chapter fifty-six, Stephen goes to Valerie and asks her to pretend to be her lover. Stephen stays with Valerie all night, returning home to find Martin waiting outside. Stephen asks him to continue waiting, that Mary will soon need him. Stephen then enters her house, where Mary confronts her. Stephen allows Mary to believe that she has taken Valerie for a lover. Mary leaves with Martin, leaving Stephen to mourn their love and her inability to give Mary the respectability she deserves.



## Book 5: Chapters 51-56 Analysis

Martin Hallam, the only man besides her father that Stephen has ever cared for, suddenly returns to her life. When he does, Martin brings a respectability to Stephen and Mary's lives that helps pull Mary from the depression that Jamie and Barbara's deaths caused. Mary is happy, able to go to a fancy restaurant without worrying about people causing Stephen to feel uncomfortable. However, this sense of respectability leads to affection on Martin's part, causing him to enter a competition with Stephen to win Mary's heart. The reader at first believes that Stephen will win. However, Stephen begins to recall Mary's unhappiness when Stephen could not spend every moment with her, when Lady Massey refused to have them for Christmas, and when Jamie and Barbara died. This causes Stephen to acknowledge that like Angela Crossby, she could never give Mary the respectability she deserves. Stephen makes the ultimate sacrifice, giving Mary to Martin so that Mary might find some happiness in her life.



# Characters

## Stephen Gordon

Stephen Gordon is the main character of the novel. Stephen is the daughter of an English lord and his wife. Stephen is their only child, conceived after ten years of trying. Sir Philip had wanted a boy named Stephen, so he began calling his child Stephen even while she was still in her mother's womb. When the child was born and turned out to be a girl, Sir Philip insisted on keeping the name Stephen. Both parents adore their child as she grows out of infancy, but when she enters childhood and moves on through adolescence, both parents begin to become aware of a difference in their child.

Stephen herself knows she is different. Stephen longs to be a boy, to live as a boy and do the things a boy can do. Stephen shuns everything feminine, including clothing and etiquette. Stephen's father encourages this behavior in his daughter, encouraging her to feel free to be herself. Stephen's father often takes her hunting, allowing her to make kills despite the shock this causes in the neighbors. Due to her father's acceptance, Stephen is allowed to grow with some sort of acceptance of her own oddities. However, when Stephen falls in love, first with a housemaid and later with a neighbor's wife, Stephen begins to realize that her oddities will never allow her to live a normal life.

Stephen rebels against society, insisting on dressing in her own fashion and living as she sees fit. This rebellion causes Stephen to have a falling out with her own mother and to find herself darkly isolated from society. A friend introduces Stephen to a group of others, people like herself. Stephen then falls in love after a heroic stint during the war, and she finds happiness for the first time. However, Stephen's lover is young and unable to handle the ostracism that she and Stephen must suffer at the hands of normal society. Stephen once again finds herself alone, praying that God will someday allow her to live accepted by all.

## Sir Philip Gordon

Sir Philip Gordon is the master of a manor in the countryside of England. Sir Philip married late in life and his wife was only able to provide for him a single child. This child is a daughter, named Stephen at Sir Philip's insistence. Sir Philip adores his daughter and is determined to give her a perfect life full of love. However, as his daughter grows, Sir Philip comes to realize his child is different. Sir Philip begins collecting books that tell him about his daughter, explaining her condition and how to deal with it. Sir Philip embraces this philosophy, but finds himself unable to share the knowledge with his wife or his daughter, in fear of hurting them.

Sir Philip does all he can to protect his daughter. Sir Philip makes sure his daughter has a good education at home and plans to send her away to school when she reaches maturity, aware that marriage and security will never be something Stephen will be able



to attain. However, an accident causes Sir Philip to die an early death before he could explain to either Stephen or her mother about Stephen's unusual situation.

## Lady Anna Gordon

Lady Anna Gordon is Sir Philip's wife. Lady Anna adores her child when she is an infant. However, this adoration changes as Stephen grows. Lady Anna cannot relate to her child. Lady Anna senses something odd, something strange in her child that causes her to shun their relationship. As Stephen grows older, Lady Anna continues to struggle with her antipathy toward her own child, a situation that creates tension in her marriage. For the first time, Lady Anna senses that she might lose the affection she has always taken for granted in her marriage.

When Sir Philip dies, Lady Anna lives side by side with her daughter, unable to force herself to take an interest in her life. It is not until Lady Anna is given proof of her daughter's inversion that she finally reveals to Stephen her true feelings. Lady Anna asks Stephen to move out of their home and to only return in order to keep up appearances for the neighbors. At this time, Lady Anna admits her distaste for her only child and wishes her dead at her feet. This causes an unbreachable barrier between mother and daughter that will continue throughout the remainder of the novel.

## Mary Llewellyn

Mary Llewellyn is a young, Welsh woman who was orphaned as a small child. Mary grew up at the home of a married cousin, a place where she was an unwanted burden. When World War I is in full swing, Mary joins the Breakspeare Unit of the French Army Ambulance Corps. It is here that Mary becomes an apprentice to Stephen Gordon. Stephen cares a great deal for Mary. After the war has ended, Stephen promises to always care for Mary. They go on a trip together in order to help Mary recover her strength after the stress of the war. During this trip, Stephen attempts to ignore her love for Mary, but Mary eventually convinces her that she understands the dangers of their love and wants to indulge it anyway.

Mary and Stephen live happily together in Paris for several months after their trip. However, when Stephen returns to her work and can no longer spend all her time with Mary, Mary becomes bored and unhappy. Once again on the advice of a friend, Stephen introduces Mary to Valerie Seymour and her group of friends. This leads Mary to meet Jamie and Barbara, a couple not unlike herself and Stephen. However, when Jamie and Barbara die, Mary begins to question the unfairness of their lifestyle. At this point, a man comes into their lives that Mary claims she could love if not for Stephen. Stephen decides to take herself out of the equation and allow Mary to find happiness in normal society.



## Martin Hallam

Martin Hallam is Stephen's first true friend. Stephen and Martin meet at a neighborhood party. They begin spending a great deal of time together, sharing many of the same interests. Stephen is overwhelmed by affection for Martin, surprised that someone such as she could find a good friend like Martin. However, Martin one day decides he is in love with Stephen. Martin asks Stephen to marry him, causing confusion and anger in Stephen. Stephen sends Martin away.

Many years later, after World War I, Martin contacts Stephen with the request that they renew their friendship. Martin has learned about inversion and has become accepting of Stephen's lifestyle. However, as their friendship begins to grow, Martin falls in love with Stephen's lover, Mary. Martin tells Stephen of his love for Mary and tells her that he does not want to hurt her, but Stephen challenges him to try to steal Mary away. Martin is unsuccessful. However, Martin convinces Stephen that Mary is unhappy in their relationship and that she would be better off married to Martin. Stephen agrees and lies to Mary in order to convince her to go with Martin.

## Roger Antrim and Violet Antrim Peacock

Roger Antrim and his sister, Violet, are childhood neighbors of Stephen's whom she was often forced to play with. Violet is a very feminine woman who likes to prove her femininity over Stephen's masculinity. This causes a great deal of pain for Stephen throughout her childhood. As she grows older, Violet learns of Stephen's affection for Angela Crossby and she often visits her to rub into Stephen's nose the growing relationship between her brother Roger and Angela.

Roger Antrim is a bully of a child who often treats Stephen poorly because of her oddities. As Roger grows older, he joins the military. Roger meets Angela Crossby while visiting some mutual friends and they begin a love affair that eventually comes to Stephen's attention, breaking her heart. This love affair leads to Stephen writing a letter that will later come into her mother's possession and end their relationship. In the end, Roger is killed during World War I during the heroic attempt to save a fellow soldier, causing Stephen to reluctantly find some respect for the young man.

## Angela Crossby

Angela Crossby is a neighbor of Stephen's. One day, Stephen saves Angela's dog, Tony, from a larger dog. They become friends and that friendship quickly develops into a love affair. Stephen wants to run away with Angela, to care for her, but Angela refuses because she is afraid of losing the security of her rich husband. Angela had a rough childhood after the American Civil War that caused her to become an actress and rely on the desires of men to care for her. Angela's marriage to Ralph Crossby has provided her with a comfortable life that she is afraid of losing.





Angela adores Stephen, but she often holds her at arm's length while still encouraging her with her words and actions. When Angela meets Roger Antrim, she begins an affair with him. Stephen finds out one morning when she goes to check on Angela. Angela becomes afraid Stephen will tell her husband about Roger in an attempt at retribution, so she strikes first, giving her husband a letter Stephen wrote to her, expressing her deep affections, and claiming she never did anything but attempt to reform Stephen. Angela's husband gives this letter to Lady Anna, causing a rift in her relationship with Stephen.

## Miss Puddleton or Puddles

Miss Puddleton, or Puddle, is a governess brought in to prepare Stephen for Oxford. Puddle is a gentle woman who has a high education. Puddle teaches Stephen well, encouraging her incredible talent for writing. At the same time, Puddle becomes aware of Stephen's oddities. Puddle recognizes these oddities because she too suffers the same strangeness of personality. As Stephen struggles with her identity, however, Puddle finds it difficult to admit the truth to her because she is afraid of Lady Anna's reaction. As time goes on, Puddle remains Stephen's long term companion and encourages her to use her writing to improve the situation of all people like herself. Eventually Puddle goes to live at Morton with Lady Anna, giving Stephen the room she needs to find happiness in her life.

## Mademoiselle Duphot

Mademoiselle Duphot is a French tutor Sir Philip hires to teach his daughter. Mademoiselle is a cheerful, loving woman whom Stephen discovers she can push over quite easily. Stephen learns her French perfectly, becoming good friends with Mademoiselle Duphot. Eventually, however, Sir Philip feels it is necessary to bring in a more educated tutor and he hired Puddle to take Mademoiselle Duphot's place, sending Mademoiselle Duphot back to Paris to care for her ailing mother. Years later, Stephen will meet Mademoiselle Duphot on the streets of Paris and they will become reacquainted, often visiting with one another until Stephen becomes afraid that Mademoiselle Duphot will not understand Stephen's lifestyle and push her away. Instead, Stephen stops visiting Mademoiselle Duphot herself.

## Jamie and Barbara

Jamie and Barbara are a couple of women Mary and Stephen meet through Valerie Seymour. Jamie and Barbara both grew up in the same tiny village in the Highlands. When it became clear that Jamie was an invert, the village began pushing her away. Barbara talked Jamie into leaving the village together so that they might have a life alone together. Jamie brings them to Paris where she has arranged to attend music school. Jamie is very poor, but very proud. When Barbara becomes ill, Jamie refuses to take money from Stephen and Mary for her care. Eventually Barbara contracts double





pneumonia and dies. Jamie asks Stephen and Mary to leave her alone with the body before the undertaker would come for it. When Stephen and Mary return the following morning, they find Jamie has shot herself. This event causes Mary great heartache, causing her to doubt her lifestyle and her ability to be happy.



# Objects/Places

## Psychology Books

Sir Philip Gordon studies many psychology books, some by the author Krafft Ebing, to learn about the condition he believed his daughter suffered. Later, when Stephen learns she is to leave Morton, she finds these books and learns she is not alone in her unconventional behaviors.

## Pearl Ring

Stephen buys a pearl ring for Angela in order to show her deep affection for her.

## Suits

Rather than wear the feminine dresses and ribbons of her contemporaries, Stephen preferred to wear suits with ties and trousers. This caused people to stare and single Stephen out as an odd character.

## Letter from Stephen to Angela

When Stephen discovers Angela's affair with Roger Antrim, she writes a letter that discusses her deeply felt love for Angela. Unfortunately, Angela gives this letter to Ralph, who in turn gives it to Stephen's mother, Lady Anna, as proof of Stephen's immoral personality.

## The Furrow

The Furrow is Stephen's first book, a highly successful book that turns her into an overnight success.

## Motor Cars

Stephen buys a very fancy, expensive motor car to impress Angela Crosby. Later, Stephen buys two new cars for use by her new lover, Mary Llewellyn.

## Breakspeare Unit

The Breakspeare Unit is the unit of the French Army Ambulance Corps that Stephen is assigned to on the front lines of World War I. It is while serving a member of this unit that Stephen meets Mary Llewellyn.



## **Rue Jacob**

Rue Jacob is the street in Paris on which Stephen buys a house. Stephen shares this home with Puddle until the war begins, then shares it with Mary after the war.

## **Morton**

Morton is the name of the estate where Stephen grows up. When Stephen's mother learns of her unusual sexuality, Stephen is sent away from Morton, only to return on occasion as a guest to her mother's home.

## **The Grange**

The Grange is the home where Angela Crossby lives with her unhappy husband, Ralph.

## **Paris**

Stephen moves to Paris several years after leaving Morton because a friend convinces her that she needs to have more life experience to use in her writing.

## **Compiegne**

Compiegne is the once prosperous villa where Stephen's unit, a section of the French Army Ambulance Corps, is based during the war.



# Themes

## Homosexuality or Inversion

This novel centers on a woman born in the late part of the nineteenth century who discovers early in her life that she is not like most girls her age. Stephen dislikes dresses and dolls, preferring to wear trousers and hunt alongside her father. Stephen dresses up like Nelson as a small child, pretending to be the great hero as she races around her father's property. Later, Stephen prefers to learn fencing than the social etiquette most other girls spend their days learning. Stephen knows she is odd, knows that she does not fit in with her contemporaries. Even her own mother, Lady Anna, rejects her daughter out of an instinctive understanding that there is something different about her.

Stephen has her first crush on a woman when she is only seven. Stephen becomes enamored with a young housemaid, Collins. Stephen follows the woman around, often helping with her chores and sharing her days. When Collins tells Stephen that she has a bad knee, Stephen begins praying that God will take Collins' bad knee from her and give it to Stephen, in order to bring relief to her beloved. This affair ends badly, however, when Stephen discovers Collins kissing a male servant in the garden shed.

Stephen's mother pushes her to conform, to dress and act like the young lady she is. When Stephen meets Martin Hallam and they begin spending many hours walking together, Lady Anna becomes hopeful that her daughter will marry and live a normal life. Unfortunately, the moment Martin confesses his love to Stephen, she pushes him away, running from the confusion his announcement creates in her.

In time Stephen falls in love again with a neighbor woman. This time her affection is returned, but only marginally. Eventually, Stephen's new lover spurns her in favor of a man, leaving Stephen devastated. At the same time, Stephen's mother learns of her unusual love affair. In her humiliation, she sends her daughter away. It is then that Stephen discovers books in her father's study that tell her what she is and that she is not alone. Stephen begins her life anew, embracing friends like herself and taking a lover who promises to be faithful despite the social ostracism they are sure to face. It is this overwhelming situation in Stephen's life that makes homosexuality, or inversion as it is called in the book, a major theme of the book.

## Acceptance

Stephen Gordon wants nothing more from the people around her than acceptance. Stephen has known since she was a small child that she is not like most girls. Stephen dresses differently, feels differently, and loves differently. These differences create a social barrier that Stephen cannot overcome. Neighbors gossip about Stephen, even those who have known her since she was a small child. Strangers point and whisper.



Even people in her own home, invited guests talk about Stephen behind her back as though she were a clown inviting gossip.

Stephen's father loved her more than anything in the world. Sir Philip understood his daughter's differences and embraced them as a part of her. Unfortunately, Lady Anna, Stephen's mother, did not understand the oddities she senses in her only child. Lady Anna could not accept this child as her own, to embrace her oddities the way Sir Philip could. As a result, there was tension in her marriage, leaving Sir Philip unable to explain his daughter to his wife. Sir Philip died without being able to explain to Lady Anna why their daughter needed more love, not less.

When Lady Anna learns of Stephen's unusual desires, she denounces them, forcing her daughter to leave her childhood home. Stephen is heartbroken, but in her heartache, she learns the truth about herself. Stephen begins to meet people like herself and finds a sort of acceptance among these people. In fact, Stephen finally takes a lover who promises love and acceptance. Unfortunately, the life of an invert during this time period is difficult. They are often shunned by polite society, unwelcome at the tables of respectable families. Therefore, finding acceptance in this social atmosphere becomes the one thing Stephen wants the most, but the one thing she will constantly be denied. It is this situation that makes acceptance a theme of the novel.

## Love

Every person wants to be loved, no matter who they are or how they fit in with society. Sir Philip and Lady Anna had a love to be admired, the kind of love that is rare and beautiful. However, their love created a child who is odd, an embarrassment to her mother. Lady Anna shuns her daughter, throwing her out of her beloved Morton upon discovering her strange sexual desires. Lady Anna could not accept the differences that made her daughter who she was and could not love a child who was so strange, so odd, as Stephen.

Stephen has many loves in this novel. She loves Collins, the maid, but this love is shattered when seven-year-old Stephen finds Collins kissing a man. Stephen loves Angela Crossby, but is pushed away when she cannot give Angela the respectability and security that she craves. Stephen is loved by Puddle, her devoted governess and companion, but even Puddle cannot tell Stephen the truth about her own inversion. Over time, Stephen begins to believe she will always be alone, an outcast in a world that cannot accept who she is.

When Stephen meets Mary, she fights her feelings for this young, beautiful woman. Stephen wants to protect Mary, to keep her from suffering the indignities of an affair with a woman such as herself. However, Mary pushes through Stephen's barriers, convincing her that she is strong enough to love an invert. Their affair is passionate, bringing Stephen the love she thought she would never know. However, in the end Stephen must choose between her own happiness and that of Mary. Stephen pushes Mary away so that she might find the happiness Mary desires.



At the same time, Jamie and Barbara have overcome all kinds of shame and betrayal in order to be together. However, Jamie's pride will not allow her to accept the help Barbara needs to fight a chronic illness. When Barbara dies, Jamie is lost without her, knowing that she cannot survive in this cruel world without the love of her life. Jamie commits suicide, preferring death with Barbara than a life without her. For these reasons, love is a main theme of the novel.



# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The narration is similar to the omniscient third person point of view, but also has some elements of the authorial voice. At times, the author makes comments about the emotions or opinions of characters that are distant from the narration, showing the reader things that are going on around Stephen that she may not be aware of. Despite these diversions, the majority of the narration centers on Stephen, the main character of the novel, telling her story from a point of view that explores both her actions and her deeply felt emotions.

The point of view of this novel works because it is very well crafted, leaving very little room for confusion. The author centers most of her narration on Stephen, the heroine of the novel, keeping her story tight. There are times in which the author jumps into the minds of other characters, telling the reader things that Stephen could not possibly know or understand. However, these jumps are well done, set apart from the previous sections by numbered sections to remove the chance of confusion, and returning to Stephen in a timely manner. The author tells her story without too much abstraction, without wandering too far from her main point, leaving the reader capable of easily understanding the narration.

## Setting

The novel begins in England, in the countryside at Castle Morton, the family home of the Gordons. This location is a beautiful estate with a large, beautiful home and stables, as well as a large amount of property that includes large gardens and a pond where swans live. Stephen grows up on this beautiful property, aware that it will someday be hers, and feeling as though it is a part of her soul. Therefore it is heartbreaking for Stephen when she is forced to leave Morton. The setting then changes to a small, impersonal flat in London where Stephen lives for two years with her companion, Puddle. This flat is temporary and that is made clear in the lack of furnishings and personal items. Finally, Stephen moves to Paris and buys a home there that she lovingly remodels and furnishes herself. This place is different from Morton, but it is a home that expresses Stephen's personality in a way Morton never could have, creating a haven for Stephen like she has never had before.

The places in this novel are important because of the way they reflect Stephen's personality. Also important, however, is the time period in which the novel is set. The novel begins in the 1880s, moving through Stephen's first forty years of life, ending in the mid 1920s. This time period is important because it is a time before society understood or even attempted to accept the homosexual, or invert. Stephen, herself an invert, lives in this society at first feeling as though she is the only invert in the world. Later, as Stephen comes to realize there are thousands in the world like her, she



becomes angry with society, unable to understand why her kind must be ostracized, left alone in a world that often pairs itself off. Due to this social atmosphere, the time period of this novel is deeply important, allowing the reader to see what life was like for men and women like Stephen, and to see how little things have changed in the nearly hundred years since this novel was written.

## Language and Meaning

This novel was written in the 1920s; therefore, the language tends to be a little more formal than modern readers might be familiar with. The author was an English woman who lived a life similar to Stephen Gordon's, and the language reflects this woman's lifestyle and experiences. The word *invert*, or the term *inversion*, is used often to describe Stephen's homosexuality, a word that was common in the time when this novel was written. There is a great deal of French in this novel because Paris is the main setting of the last half of the novel. These phrases are not translated in the narrative, but often the words can be deciphered by their context, although often their direct translation is not often important to the comprehension of the novel.

The language of the novel is stiff and can cause some difficulty for some readers. However, the language is a precise English that fits the time period of the novel's setting. There are many words in the text that some readers might not be familiar with, including the use of the word *inversion* to mean homosexuality, but their use in the text makes it easy for the reader to decipher what they might mean. The foreign phrases in this novel, especially the last half of the novel, are numerous and they are not translated for the reader's easy comprehension. However, many of these phrases are used in such a way the reader can decipher their intended meaning, if not their exact translation.

## Structure

The novel is divided into five books and fifty-six chapters. Each chapter is broken into small sections, each marked with a separate number to alert the reader as to a change in narration or setting. The novel is told in a linear fashion, beginning in the months before Stephen's birth, taking the reader through her childhood and into adulthood, ending with the end of Stephen's one consummated love affair. The novel is told in exposition dotted with dialogue, a type of narration that allows a great deal to happen in a small amount of space.

The plot of the novel follows the life of Stephen Gordon, a young English girl who comes to discover she is a lesbian, or an *invert* as she calls herself in the novel. The novel describes in unusual detail for its time Stephen's discoveries of her own odd behavior and the struggles she suffers in trying to find acceptance for her own oddness. The novel includes several subplots, including Stephen's deep love for her horses, her father's struggles to find a way to make Stephen's life easier, and Puddle's own struggles with her inversion. All the plots come to a satisfying, if heartbreaking, conclusion at the end of the novel.





## Quotes

"He insisted on calling the infant Stephen, nay more, he would have it baptized by that name." Book 1: Chap. 1, p. 13

"Sometimes, when the child's heart would feel full past bearing, she must tell him her problems in small, stumbling phrases. Tell him how much she longed to be different, longed to be someone like Nelson." Book 1: Chap. 2, p. 26

"And then in his terror for this well-beloved woman, Sir Philip committed the first cowardly action of his life—he who would not have spared himself pain, could not bear to inflict it on Anna." Book 1: Chap. 5, p. 54

"At seventeen Stephen was taller than Anna, who had used to be considered quite tall for a woman, but Stephen was nearly as tall as her father—not a beauty this, in the eyes of the neighbors." Book 1: Chap. 8, p. 72

"After she had gone he sat alone, and the lie was still bitter to his spirit as he sat there, and he covered his face for the shame that was in him—but because of the love that was in him he wept." Book 1: Chap. 13, p. 107

"Sir Philip's death deprived his child of three things; of companionship of mind born of real understanding, of a stalwart barrier between her and the world, and above all of love—that faithful love that would gladly have suffered all things for her sake, in order to spare her suffering." Book 2: Chap. 15, p. 121

"Stephen left Cornwall without a regret; everything about it had seemed to her depressing." Book 2: Chap. 21, p. 163

"Watching this deadly decay that threatened all that was fine in her erstwhile pupil, Puddle must sometimes groan loudly in spirit; she must even argue with God about it." Book 2: Chap. 24, p. 183

"Stephen looked up with bewildered eyes: 'Would you go with Cain whom god marked?' she said slowly, for she had not understood Puddle's meaning, so she asked her once more: 'Would you go with Cain?'" Book 2: Chap. 27, p. 205

"Soon after the New Year, nine months later, Stephen's second novel was published. It failed to create the sensation the first had created, there was something disappointing about it." Book 3: Chap. 29, p. 218

"For as though gaining courage from the terror that is war, many a one who was even as Stephen, had crept out of her hole and come into the daylight, come into the daylight



and faced her country: "Well, here I am, will you take me or leave me?" Book 3: Chap. 34, p. 271

"And so Jaime who dared not go home to Beedles for fear of shaming the woman she loved, Jamie who dared not openly mourn lest Barbara's name be defiled through her mourning, Jamie had dared to go home to God—to trust herself to His more perfect mercy, even as Barbara had gone home before her." Book 5: Chap. 50, p. 403



## Topics for Discussion

Who is Stephen Gordon? Why does she have a masculine name? Does this name reflect Stephen's personality? Did this name influence the way in which Stephen grew up, her preferences in clothing?

What age is Stephen when she realizes she is different? How is she different? What does she think of these oddities? What does her father think of these oddities? What does her mother think of these oddities? How do her parents influence Stephen's behaviors and emotions? Does the way Stephen is raised have anything to do with her oddness?

Who is Collins? Why is Collins important to Stephen? How does Stephen behave around Collins? How does Stephen attempt to help Collins? What happens when Stephen sees Collins with a man? How does this make Stephen feel? Why does Stephen name her horse after Collins? How does Stephen's reaction to Collins help her father to recognize Stephen's inversion?

Who is Angela Crossby? How does Angela feel about Stephen? Why does Angela fight Stephen's affections while at the same time taking comfort from them? What does this say about Angela? Why does Angela refuse to run away with Stephen? Why does Angela take up with Roger Antrim? How did Angela's experiences after the American Civil War affect her emotions?

Why does Stephen leave Morton? How does this situation affect her emotions? How does this separation from her childhood home affect Stephen's ability to write? Why does her friend tell Stephen that she needs to have more life experiences? What does he mean by that? Why does this same friend introduce Stephen to Valerie Seymour? What is this acquaintance supposed to provide for Stephen? Does it?

Why does Stephen want to fight on the front lines when the war begins? Why does Stephen feel the need to offer her services to her country? What kind of women does Stephen notice coming into the forefront during the war? Why is this? How does Stephen eventually end up on the front lines in France? What does she do there? How does Stephen become wounded? What medal does this earn Stephen?

Who is Puddle? What secret does Puddle have that she struggles to share with Stephen? Why is Puddle's reaction to inversion different from Stephen's? How does Puddle feel about Stephen's inversion? About Stephen's lifestyle? How do these feelings stem from Puddle's own personal struggles?

Who is Mary Llewellyn? Why does Stephen struggle to tell Mary how she feels about her? What is Stephen afraid of? Is this a logical fear? How does Mary overcome Stephen's fear? What happens in their relationship to convince Stephen that Mary is not as happy as she claims? Why does Stephen lie to Mary? Why does Stephen push Mary off onto Martin Hallam?



Who are Jamie and Barbara? What kind of relationship do they have? How does their relationship affect Mary? How does it affect Stephen? Why do Mary and Stephen deal with this situation in two different ways? What does this say about each acceptance of their own sexuality? How does this precipitate Stephen's decision to encourage Mary to find a more acceptable life?

What is inversion? Why does Stephen use this word in association with herself? What is the implication of a word like this used in association with Stephen? How does Stephen feel about this label? How did her father feel? How does her mother feel? How does the reactions of her parents influence Stephen's own feelings about herself?